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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EB-00	ED-01	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00	HHS-01	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	DCP-01
	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PER-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00
	USIE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00
	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/011W				

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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6242
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI
USMISSION GENEVA
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
JICPAC HONOLULU HI
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 000394

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND EAP/PD/KFOSTER
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR PRM
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR DRL

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CINCPAC FOR FPA
SECDEF FOR ISA/EA/ABLAGG

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PREF](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#) [CB](#) [RELFREE](#) [HUMANR](#) [ETMIN](#)
SUBJECT: EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE IN THE CENTRAL
HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM

REF: HCMC 0032

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: AN EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE PACKED THE COMPOUND OF A 90-YEAR-OLD WOODEN CHURCH WITH THOUSANDS OF ETHNIC MINORITY CATHOLIC WORSHIPPERS FROM VILLAGES IN KON TUM PROVINCE IN VIETNAM'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. THE TWO-HOUR SERVICE, CONDUCTED ENTIRELY IN ETHNIC LANGUAGES, INCORPORATED TRIBAL MUSIC AND DANCE. AFTERWARDS, DURING A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR IN THE PRESENCE OF WHAT APPEARED TO BE PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY OFFICERS, THE CHURCH'S PRIEST WAS RELUCTANT TO ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF WORSHIPPERS IN ATTENDANCE. POST ESTIMATES THAT UPWARDS OF 10,000 PERSONS WERE PRESENT TO FREELY EXERCISE THEIR FAITH. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) AMBASSADOR, CG, CONOFF, FSN POL/ECON ASSISTANT AND THE AMBASSADOR'S INTERPRETER ATTENDED THE EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE AT KON TUM'S "NHA THO GO" OR "WOODEN CHURCH". CONGEN HAD BEEN INFORMED THAT THE SERVICE WOULD LIKELY BE WELL-ATTENDED. SHOULD THE NUMBER OF WORSHIPPERS OVERFLOW THE SANCTUARY, PEOPLE WOULD BE ACCOMMODATED IN AREAS IMMEDIATELY OUTSIDE THE CHURCH BUILDING. ARRIVING AT THE CHURCH, CONGENOFFS
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DISCOVERED THAT THE "OVERFLOW" AMOUNTED TO MORE THAN 10,000 WORSHIPPERS. THE CHURCH COMPOUND WAS NOT CAPABLE OF HOLDING ALL ATTENDEES AND THE SPILLOVER CROWD BLOCKED THE ROAD IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH, CAUSING DIFFICULTY FOR PASSING VEHICLES. (COMMENT: POST'S ESTIMATE OF 10,000-PLUS PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH COMPOUND IS BASED ON THE NUMBER OF ROWS IN A SECTION MULTIPLIED BY THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN EACH ROW.)

13. (U) FATHER LIEN THANH NGUYEN, AN ETHNIC VIETNAMESE KINH ORIGINALLY FROM NORTHERN VIETNAM, LED THE WORSHIP PRIMARILY IN THE BA NA LANGUAGE, WITH PORTIONS IN THE SEDANG LANGUAGE. FOLLOWING THE ORDER OF SERVICE, WORSHIPPERS DECKED IN TRADITIONAL, COLORFUL DRESS ALTERNATED STANDING AND SITTING ON THE GROUND OR ON STRAW MATS. THE MUSICAL INTERLUDES WERE PROVIDED BY ETHNIC MINORITY MUSICIANS USING TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ORGAN). GIRLS IN BRIGHTLY-WOVEN NATIVE DRESS PERFORMED DANCES, ACCOMPANIED BY

HIGHLAND GONGS. MIDWAY THROUGH THE SERVICE, THE BISHOP OF KON TUM ARRIVED TO CELEBRATE THE EUCHARIST.

14. (U) COMMUNION WAS SERVED TO THE ENTIRE CROWD BY AN ESTIMATED 30 WHITE-ROBED PRIESTS FROM LOCAL CHURCHES. THROUGHOUT THE CROWD, ORDERLY LINES CIRCLED AROUND THOSE SERVING THE COMMUNION WAFER. COMMUNION ITSELF LASTED 25 MINUTES.

15. (SBU) SOME ATTENDEES CARRIED SMALL BOOKS IN THEIR ETHNIC LANGUAGE, APPARENTLY EITHER PRAYER OR SONG BOOKS. FEW CELEBRANTS SPOKE VIETNAMESE. WORSHIPPERS
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SMILED AND WERE SHYLY CURIOUS ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGNERS/AMERICANS AT THE SERVICE. LOCAL VIETNAMESE MEDIA CARRYING STILL AND VIDEO CAMERAS DOCUMENTED THE SERVICE. PLAINCLOTHES POLICE WERE ALSO IN ATTENDANCE AND MONITORED THE CROWD FROM THE BACK, BUT AT NO TIME INTERFERED WITH THE SERVICE. (NOTE: POST BELIEVES SOME OF THE LOCAL MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES WERE ACTUALLY SECURITY AGENTS AS WELL. WHEN CONOFF TRIED TO TAKE PHOTOS TO DOCUMENT THE "MEDIA'S" PRESENCE, THEY AVERTED THEIR FACES.)

16. (SBU) COMMENT: AFTER THE SERVICE, FATHER LIEN INDICATED THAT CROWDS OF THIS SIZE - OR LARGER - ARE ROUTINE ON IMPORTANT DAYS IN THE CATHOLIC CALENDAR. ONE OF THE PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY AGENTS FOLLOWED THE AMBASSADOR AND CONGENOFFS INTO THE RECTORY, STAYED A DISCREET DISTANCE AWAY, AND DID NOT OVERTLY INTERFERE WITH CONVERSATION. FATHER LIEN, HOWEVER, SEEMED TO DOWNPLAY THE NUMBERS SEEN THAT EASTER SUNDAY. STILL, CONGENOFFS WERE IMPRESSED BY THE NATURALNESS OF BOTH THE SETTING AND THE CONGREGATION DURING THE SUNRISE SERVICE. NOBODY LOOKED FEARFUL OR FURTIVE. IT WAS A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF HOW "FREE" RELIGION CAN BE IN VIETNAM - AS LONG AS IT IS A LEGALLY RECOGNIZED RELIGION. THE LARGE, PEACEFUL CROWD - WHILE MONITORED BY PLAINCLOTHES POLICE - WAS LEFT TO PRACTICE THEIR FAITH OPENLY. THE SHEER NUMBERS, THE RESPECT FOR ETHNIC MINORITY CULTURE, AND THE QUIET INTENT OF EACH BELIEVER AS HE/SHE LISTENED TO A MASS CELEBRATED IN TWO ETHNIC LANGUAGES WAS MOVING. YAMAUCHI

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